

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1647

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

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PASS AGRICULTURE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: FARMLAND EXPROPRIATION

SUMMARY: SMODLDERING FARM LABOR DISPUTES OVER WAGES, EMPLOYEMT,
AND RIGHT TO OWN LAND HAVE PRECIPITATED GOVERNMENT POLICY STATE-
MENT ON LAND REFORM, INCLUDING POSSIBILITY OF EXPROPRIATION.
END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: FOLLOWING CAETANO'S OVERTHROWN NINE MONTHS AGO,
AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL ALENTEJO REGION
JOINED IN A COUNTRY-WIDE DEMAND FOR HIGHER WAGES AND WORK
GUARANTEES. CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN WORKERS AND LAND OWNERS,
INCLUDING STRIKES AND THREATS, RESULTED IN WORKERS' DEMANDS BEING
MET.

2. DURING THE SUMMER OF 1974 A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN BEGAN FOR
"LAND FOR THOSE WHO WORK IT," SUPPORTED BY LEAGUE OF SMALL
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FARMERS AS WELL AS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION AND THE COMMUNIST

PARTY (PCP). AGRICULTURAL LABOR IN THE ALENTEJO, STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY THE COMMUNISTS, APPLIED PRESSURE ON THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, WHICH BEGAN TAKING STEPS TO REFORM AND REORGANIZE THE LAND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM.

3. BY LATE FALL, PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT BEGAN ANNOUNCING AND IMPLEMENTING AGRARIAN LEGISLATION. INCLUDED WAS (A) LEGISLATION ALLOWING TENANTS OF RENTED, UNCULTIVATED LAND TO PURCHASE LAND; (B) ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRICULTURAL REORGANIZATION INSTITUTE (IRA), WHICH WAS GIVEN RIGHT TO RENT UNCULTIVATED OR UNDERUTILIZED LAND FROM LANDOWNERS OR LESSEES. HOWEVER, OVERALL LANDLEASE ACT IS YET TO BE PROMULGATED.

4. IN THE FALL AND EARLY WINTER, UNEMPLOYMENT IN RURAL AREAS BEGAN TO INCREASE. UNEMPLOYED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, POTENTIAL EMIGRANT WORKERS UNABLE TO LEAVE, SOME RETURNING EMIGRANT WORKERS, DISCHARGED MILITARY, AND SMALL ENTERPRENEURS SEEKING HIGHER WAGES, SWELLED SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALENTEJO. MOST FARMERS, HOWEVER, WERE NOT ABLE TO EMPLOY LARGER NUMBER OF WORKERS.

5. LEFTISTS PREDICTABLY HAVE SOUGHT TO EXPLOIT RURAL UNEMPLOYMENT. PCP HAS STEPPED UP ATTENTION TO AGRARIAN PROBLEM IN RECENT WEEKS BY HOLDING NUMBER OF POLITICIZATION SESSIONS FOR FARM WORKERS. AGRARIAN REFORM AND CALL FOR EXPROPRIATION HAS BECOME A PRINCIPAL THEME IN SPEECHES OF PCP LEADERS.

6. EXPROPRIATION: ONE FARM IN ALENTEJO HAS BEEN TAKEN OVER BY GOVERNMENT (IN LATE JANUARY) UNDER LAW WHICH ALLOWS GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN BUSINESSES "WHICH NOT CONTRIBUTING IN NORMAL WAY TOWARD DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMY." (THIS IS A DIFFERENT LAW THAN ONE DESCRIBED PARA 3.) EMBASSY'S AGATT, JUST RETURNED FROM VISIT TO Affected AREA, LEARNED THAT THE OWNER, 83, HAD PREVIOUSLY AGREED TO TAKE ON ADDITIONAL WORKERS AND MAKE SOME CHANGES IN FARMING PRACTICES TO IMPROVE OUTPUT. HE LATER REFUSED TO CARRY OUT AGREEMENT, WHICH RESULTED IN GOVERNMENT TAKE-OVER AND APPOINTMENT OF NEW MANAGER. WE UNDERSTAND FARMER WILL BE REIMBURSED.

7. JANUARY 29 NEWS STORY STATED ARMED WORKERS HAD BEGUN
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OCCUPYING UNDEREXPLORED FARMS IN BEJA AND WERE HOLDING MEETINGS REGARDING FUTURE TAKE-OVERS IN EVORA AND PORTALEGRE DISTRICTS. ACCORDING TO BEJA OFFICIAL OF IRA, STORY GREATLY EXAGGERATED AND INACCURATE. HOWEVER, ENEMPLOYED FARMERS DID ILLEGALLY BEGIN WORKING THREE FARMS. LESSEE OF ONE FARM DECIDED TO PERMIT SMALL FARMERS TO RENT HIS LAND. ON OTHER TWO FARMS, AS RESULT OF ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT INTERVENTION, SMALL FARMERS WITHDREW.

8. IN A SPEECH TO FARM WORKERS IN BEJA ON FEBRUARY 2, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AGRICULTURE, DR. ESTEVES BELO, ANNOUNCED SEVERAL MEASURES TO INCREASE NATIONAL FARM PRODUCTION AND EMPLOYMENT AMONG FARM WORKERS. THESE MEASURES INCLUDE THE EXPROPRIATION OF AND/OR COMPULSORY LEASING BY THE STATE OF LARGE ESTATES UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. IRA IS CHARGED WITH CARRYING OUT THESE OPERATIONS AND IS TO APPOINT ITS OWN EXPERTS TO MANAGE OR SUPERVISE EXPROPRIATED OR LEASED LAND. BELO SAID THAT "GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO PERMIT EXPROPRIATION OF CERTAIN AREAS OF IRRIGATED LAND OR OF LAND SUITABLE FOR IRRIGATION. ONLY LARGE OWNERS OF IRRIGATED LAND WILL HAVE THEIR LAND EXPROPRIATED BY THE STATE. OWNERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE FARMS WILL BENEFIT FROM (GOVERNMENT) SUPPORT TO HELP THEM DEVELOP THEIR OPERATIONS. THE STATE WILL ADMINISTER EXPROPRIATED LAND AND INCREASE CROP PRODUCTION. THE STATE, ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, WILL LEASE LAND COMPULSORILY OR EXPROPRIATE LAND WHICH IS NOT PROPERLY FARMED. IN ADDITION, THE STATE MAY ALSO LEASE LAND FROM THOSE LESSEES WHO DO NOT ABIDE BY THEIR CONTRACTS OR MEET THEIR SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS FARM WORKERS AS ESTABLISHED BY LAW."

9. BELO'S STAFF INFORMS EMBASSY THAT HIS SPEECH IS TO BE PUBLISHED SOON AS A GOVERNMENT POLICY STATEMENT. IRA OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, ARE STILL REWORKING THE DOCUMENT AND TELL US THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED NO INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES BELO OUTLINED.

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